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James Earl Ray Asks Black Leaders For Help

PETROS, Tenn. (UPI) — James Earl Ray wrote letters to black leaders across the country Friday asking them to support his attempt to win a new trial in the 1968 slaying of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King.

The 50-year-old confessed assassin said in a rare interview that he sent letters to "every major black leader in America." Ray spoke with reporters after three hours of talks with members of the House Select Committee on Assassinations.

Ray showed reporters a copy of a letter addressed to United Nations Ambassador Andrew Young. It began:

"I did not kill Martin Luther King Jr."

In closing, it read: "Since Memphis is a lot closer than Moscow, I ask you to meet with President Carter and ask him to request that I be given a trial. At that trial I am sure I will be able to prove that I am innocent and the secret FBI files which we will see at that trial will lead to the real murderers."

Young was one of King's aides and was with him at the Lorraine Motel in Memphis when the civil rights leader was killed by a rifle shot on April 4, 1968.

Among others, Ray said he had written to Benjamin Hooks, director of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People; Joseph Lowrey, head of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference; Vernon Jordan, director of the National Urban League; and civil rights activists Jesse Jackson and Dick Gregory.

After his eighth meeting with House investigators, Ray and his attorney Mark Lane said Ray would testify publicly before the committee Aug. 16, 17 and 18 in Washington.

In exchange for a 99-year prison term, rather than a possible death penalty, Ray pleaded guilty in 1969 to killing King but tried to withdraw the plea three days after entering it. He has been trying to win a new trial ever since.

When asked if he did kill King, he said: "No. I've never said anyone pulled the trigger. I didn't. Who did is not my responsibility."

He also said the House investigators agreed to let him take a lie detector test before his testimony.

"I don't consider the polygraph to be important. I don't think it will be decisive," said Ray, who has taken similar tests before.

Appearing healthy and calm, Ray said he was asked about a photograph he contends is that of a man called "Raoul." Ray says Raoul set him up as the fall guy in the killing of the King. Ray said the picture shows a man about 35 to 40 years old. He said it was not a "mug shot." He declined further comment.